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ANALYSIS

Inside Story of Battle to Co

TWO OF THE most powerful members of the Carter Administration responsible for national security are locked in a confrontation the likes of which Washington has not witnessed for years.

In this tough behind-the-scenes struggle, Defense Secretary Harold Brown is pitted against Adm. Stansfield Turner, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency.

At stake is control of the biggest and most important spying operations conducted by the U.S. around the world.

Turner, Carter's Annapolis classmate, is fighting for the most far-reaching reorganization of the nation's intelligence system since the establishment of the CIA 30 years ago. His plan would create a new "czar"—possibly with Cabinet rank—to manage the nation's wide-ranging intelligence activities on a centralized basis.

Brown is adamantly opposed to this sweeping reorganization scheme that would strip his Defense Department of control over the two key spying agencies. One, the National Security Agency (NSA), intercepts radio communications and other signals worldwide. The other is the top-secret National Reconnaissance Office (NRO), which operates a network of spy satellites.

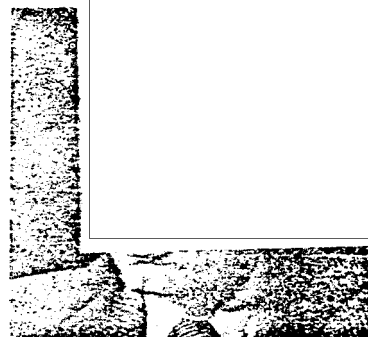
In contrast with these multibillion-dollar operations, the work of the CIA is a modest enterprise with a budget of substantially less than a billion dollars a year.

At stake—security. On the face of it, the Brown-Turner struggle appears to be nothing more than one of those bureaucratic battles that are commonplace in Washington. Actually, far more is involved.

The core issue goes to the heart of the nation's long-term security in a rapidly changing world. In simplest terms: Is the present intelligence system adequately providing the President with the information he needs to protect essential American interests and deal with the danger of war?

Specifically: What is more important for the President in peacetime—a day-to-day picture of the movement of Soviet tanks in Czechoslovakia or information on Russia's long-range economic strength and weakness?

In the National Security Council debate over reorganization, Turner has argued that it is a mistake to allow



Power struggle over the biggest U.S. spying operations pits CIA Director Stansfield Turner (left) against Secretary of Defense Harold Brown.

spying priorities to be dominated by tactical military considerations.

His case: Economic and other non-military information often may be of greater value to the President and other policy makers than tactical military intelligence. The President's chief intelligence adviser, not the Defense Secretary, should determine the "targets" given top priority by the National Security Agency and the National Reconnaissance Office.

Brown challenges this whole approach. His argument for retaining Pentagon control over the principal spying agencies and for killing Turner's reorganization plan is summed up this way by a Defense Department source:

"Military intelligence should be given No. 1 priority in matters of national security. Without control over the NSA and the NRO, the military would not be able to advise the President properly and authoritatively on military matters. If the Turner plan is adopted, the Defense Secretary would have to stand in line to request the gathering of vital military information."

The battle between Turner and Brown inside the National Security Council is described as dignified and highly intellectual but still, in the words of one observer, "they really are toe-to-toe on this issue."

Outside the secret White House deliberations of the National Security Council, the struggle is becoming increasingly heated and personalized.

Sources at the Pentagon—but not Brown—are challenging Turner's credentials as a future intelligence czar. One charge involves a classified letter by the CIA Director questioning the 1.2-billion-dollar sale to Iran of sophisticated AWACS—airborne warning and control systems. Turner

cited security risks because of highly sensitive coding equipment aboard the aircraft.

Pentagon critics say if the CIA Director had co-ordinated with the Defense Department, State Department and the National Security Council, he would have been aware that the version of the plane offered Iran does not include the coding device.

In the words of one Pentagon source: "This goes to the heart of the dispute over Turner's plan to take control of all intelligence-collection operations. If he is going to operate in this unilateral way, it gives concern that the Defense Department might not get the intelligence it needs."

The alternatives. Top officials now are being drawn into the Brown-Turner battle. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance reportedly is throwing his support behind the CIA Director and his plan to establish nonmilitary control over major spying operations.

Bert Lance, Director of the Office of Management and Budget, is said to favor a compromise that independent observers maintain would be tantamount to a victory for the Defense Secretary and a defeat for Turner.

The Lance compromise would give the new intelligence czar appreciably less power than Turner advocates and would leave Brown in control of the two biggest spying agencies.

Now it's up to Carter to hand down a verdict in the Turner-Brown contest for effective control of America's massive worldwide spying operations. His decision will determine not only the structure of the intelligence system but also its effectiveness at a critical juncture in U.S. relations with the rest of the world.

This analysis was written by Deputy Editor Joseph Fromm.